Gunner Depew

By

Albert N. Depew

Ex-Gunner and Chief Petty Officer, U.S. Navy
Member of the Foreign Legion of France
Captain Gun Turret, French Battleship Cassard
Winner of the Croix de Guerre

CHAPTER XIX—Continued.
—17—

I noticed that all the time he was writing the word and giving us the stationery, the sentry was laughing and having a great time with his own little self, but I figured he was just acting German, and that nothing was important about it.

We were all tickled to death to get a chance to let our people know where we were, and each man thought a long time about what he would say, and who he would write to, before he ever started to write. Each man wanted to say all he could in the small space he had, and we wanted to let our friends know how badly they were treating us without saying it in so many words, because we knew the Huns would censor the letters, and it would go hard with anyone who complained much. So most of the men said they were having a great time and were treated very well, and spread it on so thick that their friends would figure they were lying because they had to.

One fellow had an idea that was better than that, though. He had been in jail in Portsmouth, England, for three months, for beating up a constable, and he had had a pretty rough time. So he wrote a pal of his that he had been captured by the Germans, but that everything was going along pretty well. In fact, he said, the only other trip he had ever been on, where he had a better time, was the three months' vacation he had spent in Portsmouth two years before, which he thought the friend would remember. He said that trip was better than this one, so the friend could figure out for himself how pleasant this one was. Everybody thought this was a great idea, but unfortunately not all of us had been in jail, so we could not all use it. Which was just as well, we thought, because the Germans would be suspicious if all of us compared this vacation with others.

A few of the men did not have anybody they could write to, and some did not know their friends' addresses, so they would write letters to friends of the other men, and sign it with the friend's nickname.

As soon as a man had finished his letter, he had to go out to the center of the camp, where they had built a raised platform. There the sentries took the letters, and the men formed around the square. There were officers on the platform reading the letters. We thought they read them there in the open, before us, so that we would know they were not tampering with the letters, and we thought the heaven would fall if they were getting so unkultured as that.

Finally, all the men had finished their letters and turned them over to the officers, who read them. And then we saw why the sentry laughed.

The officers tore up every one of the letters. They were anxious that we would see them do it, so none of us would have any hope that our friends would get word.

But we said to ourselves that, if it was information they wanted, they had as much as was good for them, which was none at all, because I do not think one letter in the bunch had a single word of truth in it. But we were all very angry and pretty low after that, because it showed the Huns still had plenty of kultur left, after all, and we knew there was rough sledding ahead of us. Also, some of the men were sore because they had wasted their time thinking up different ways of tipping their friends off to the real state of affairs, and all for nothing. Why they should worry about time, I could not see. Time was the only thing we had plenty of, and I for one, thought we were going to have still more of it.

Going back to the barracks we tried to sing "Pack Up Your Troubles," but there was not much pep in it. We were not downhearted, though; at least, we said we were not.

CHAPTER XX.

Kultur—the Real Stuff.

Neustrelitz was mainly for Russian prisoners, and there were neither British nor French soldiers interned there—only sailors of the merchant marine such as the men I was with. The Russians were given far worse treatment than any other prisoners. This was for two reasons, as near as I could make out. One was that the Russian would stand most anything, whereas the British and French could only be goaded to a certain point, and beyond that lay trouble. The other reason was that the Russians sent German prisoners to Siberia, or at least, so the Huns thought, and Fritz hates the cold. So, hating the Russians, and realizing that they were used to being under-dogs, Fritz picked on them and bullied them in a way that the rest of us would not have stood. We would have rushed them and gone west with bayonets first.

The barracks were made of spruce, and were about ninety feet long and twenty-five feet wide, and you can take it from me that as carpenters, whoever made them were fine farmers. There were cracks in them that you could drive an automobile through. When we were there, each barracks had a stove in the center, a good stove and a big one, but at first it was of no use to us, because the Germans would not give us coal or wood for it. But after shivering for a while, we began ripping the boards out of the barracks, and taking the dividing boards from the benches that we used for beds.

Later, they gave each of us a mattress filled with wood shavings, and a blanket that was about as warm as a pane of glass. The mattresses were placed on the ground in the barracks, which were very damp, and after three or four days, the shavings would begin to rot and the mattresses to smell. In order to keep warm we slept as close together as we could, which caused our various diseases to spread rapidly.

When we were receiving our rations, the sentries would offer us an extra ration if we would take a lash from their belts. We were so hungry that many and many a man would go up and take a swat in any part of his body from the heavy leather belts with brass tongue and buckle, just to get a little more "shadow" soup or barley coffee or mud bread.

One morning the sentries picked out ten men from our barracks, of which I was one, and drilled us over a field near the kuche. There was a large tank in the field and we had to pump water into it. It was very cold, and we were weak and sick, so we would fall one after another, not caring whether we ever got up or not. Fritz would smash those who fell with his rifle butt. We asked for gloves, because our hands were freezing, but all we got was "Nichts."

After we had been there for about an hour and a half, one of our men became very sick, so that I thought he was going to die, and when he fell over, I reported it to a sentry. The sentry came over, saw him lying in the snow, yelled, "Schwein, nicht krank!" grabbed him by the shoulder, and pulled him all the way across the field to the office of the camp commander. Then he was placed in the guard house, where he remained for two days. The next thing we knew, the Russians had been ordered to make a box, and were being marched to the guard house to put him in it and bury him.

Another thing at Neustrelitz, that was pretty hard to stand, was the pretty habit the Huns had of coming up to the barbed wire and teasing us as though we were wild animals in a cage. Sometimes there would be crowds of people lined along the wire throwing things at us, and spitting, and having a great time generally. It was harder than ever when a family party would arrive, with vater and mutter, and maybe grosvater and grosmutter, and all the little Boche kinder, because, as you probably know, the Germans take food with them whenever they go on a party, no matter what kind, and they would stand there and stare at us like the boobs they were, eating all the time—and we so hungry that we could have eaten ourselves, almost. After they had stared a while, they would begin to feel more at home, and then would start the throwing and spitting and the "schweinhund" sangerfest, and they would have a great time generally. Probably, when they got home, they would strike off a medal for themselves in honor of the visit.

Then, too, there were always Hun soldiers on leave or off duty, who made

We Had Our Choice of Standing Up and Dying, or Falling Down and Being Killed.

it a point to pay us a visit, and though I do not think they were as bad as the civvies, especially the women, they were bad enough.

We had one bucket in each barracks, and as these buckets were used for both washing and drinking, they were always dirty. We boiled the water when we washed the clothes, to get rid of the cooties, and that left a settling in it that looked just like red lead. We had to get the water from a hydrant outside of the barracks, and for a while we drank it. But after several of the boys had gone west and we could not figure out why, a man told us he thought the water was poisoned, and a Russian doctor, who was a prisoner, slipped us word about it also. So, after that, very few of us drank water from the hydrant. I was scared stiff at first, because I had had some of the water, but after that I did not touch hydrant water.

It was a good thing for us that there was always plenty of snow in Germany, and even luckier that the Huns did not shoot us for eating it. It was about the only thing they did not deprive us of—it was not verboten.

I thought I knew what tough cooties were, in the trenches, but they were regular mollycoddles compared to the pets we had in the prison camps. After we boiled our clothes we would be free from them for not more than two hours, and then they would come back, with re-enforcements, thirsting for vengeance.

The camp at Neustrelitz was surrounded by big dogs, which were kept just outside the barbed wire. We had them going all the time. Every once in a while, some fellow would make an awful racket, and the next thing we knew, there was Fritz coming like a shot, with musket at his hip, just as they carry them in a charge, and blowing whistles at each other until they were blue in the face. Whenever they thought some one was escaping, they ran twice as fast as I ever saw them run, except when the Foreign Legion was on their heels at Dixmude.

When they got up to the dogs, they would first talk to them and then kick them, and after that, they would rest their rifles on the wire and yell "Zuruck!" at us. We all enjoyed this innocent pastime very much, and we were glad they had the dogs.

There were some things the Huns did that you just could not explain. For instance, one of the Russians walked out of the kuche, as we were passing, and we heard a bang! and the Russian keeled over and went west. Now, we had not done anything and the other Russians said he had behaved himself, worked hard and had never had any trouble. They just killed him, and that is all there was to it. But not one of us could figure out why.

After we had been at Neustrelitz for three weeks, they drilled us out of the camp to a railway station, and stood us in the snow for four hours waiting for the train. We were exhausted and began falling, one by one, and each time one of us fell, the sentries would yell, "Nicht krank!" and give us the rifle butt. We had our choice of standing up and dying or falling down and being killed, and it was a fine choice to have to make.

The cars finally pulled in, and as usual, the windows were smashed, the doors open, and the compartments just packed with snow. When we saw this, we knew we were going to get worse treatment, even, than we had been getting, and many of us wanted to die. It had not been unusual for some of the men to tell the Germans to shoot them too, and it seems as though it was always a man who wanted to live who did get it and went west.

However, all of us nearly got killed when we reached Wittenberg. When the train stopped there, we saw a big wagonload of sliced bread on the station platform and we all stared at it. We stood it as long as we could, and then we made a rush for it. But when we got nearer, we saw that there were four sentries guarding it and four women issuing it out to the German soldiers. They would not give us any, of course.

So we stood around and watched the Huns eat it, while they and the women laughed at us, and pretended that they were starving and would groan and rub their stomachs and say, "Nichts zu essen," to each other, and then grab a big hunk of bread and eat it. What we did not say to them was very little indeed. We were certainly wild if any men ever were.

Then some of us said we were going to get some of that bread if we went west for it. So we started a fight, and while they were attending to some of us, the others grabbed and hid all the bread they could. They rousted us back into the cars and we were just starting to divide up the bread when they caught us with it and took it away. We were wilder than ever then, but we could not do anything.

It got colder after we left Wittenberg, and the snow blew into the cars through the windows and doors until we were afraid to sleep for fear of freezing. It was the worst night I have ever seen, and the coal bunkers on the Yarrowdale seemed like a palace compared to the compartments, because we could at least move around in the ship, while in the train we could not move at all, and were packed so close that we could not even stretch our legs and arms. Some of the men did die, but not in my compartment, though most of us were frost-bitten about the face.

We thought that night would never end, but day came finally, and though it seemed to get colder and colder, we did not mind it so much. At about eleven that morning, we arrived at a place called Minden and saw a prison camp there—just a stockade near the tracks with the boys out in the open. We waved to them, and they waved back and gave a cheer-oh or two. We felt sorry for them, because we knew we were not going to that camp, and from what little we saw, we knew we could not be going to a worse place than they were in. I shall never forget Minden, because it was here that I received the only cigarette I had while I was in Germany.

Minden is quite a railway center, I guess, and when we pulled into the depot, we saw many troops going to the front or coming back. As at all important German railway stations, there was a Red Cross booth on the platform, with German girls handing out barley coffee and other things to the German soldiers. I saw a large shanty on the platform, with a Red Cross painted over the door. I saw the girls giving barley coffee to the soldiers, and I thought I would have a try at it and at least be polite enough to give the girls a chance of refusing me. I was refused all right, but they were so nasty about it that I put down my head and let something slip. I do not remember just what it was, but it was not very complimentary, I guess. Anyhow, I did not think anyone near there understood English, but evidently some one heard

The First and Last Cigarette.

who did, for I got an awful boot that landed me ten or twelve feet away. I fell on my hands and knees, and about a yard away I saw a cigarette stub. I dived for it like a man falling on a football, and when I came up that stub was safely in my pocket. And it stayed there until I reached Dulmen and had a chance to light it behind the barracks. If any of the other men had smelled real tobacco, they would probably have murdered me, and I could not have blamed them for it.

That was the first and last cigarette I got in Germany, and you can believe me when I say that I enjoyed it. There was not much to it, but I smoked it until there was not enough left to hold in my mouth, and then I used what was left and mixed it with the bark that we made cigarettes out of. Incidentally, this bark was great stuff. I do not know what kind of tree it was from, but it served the purpose. Whenever a fellow wanted to smoke and lit one of these bark cigarettes, a few puffs were enough. He did not want to smoke again for some time afterward, and like as not, he did not want to eat either. They were therefore very valuable.

It is very hard to get matches in the camps, and when any prisoner does get hold of one, it is made to last a long time. Here is how we make a match last. Some one gives up the sleeve of his coat, and the match is carefully lit, and the coat sleeve burned to a crisp. Then we take a button from our coats—the buttons are brass with two holes in them—pass a shoestring through the holes, knot the ends, and with the button in the center of the string, buzz it around as you have seen boys do, with the string over both hands, moving the hands together and apart until the button revolves very fast.

We then put a piece of flint against the crisped cloth, and buzz the button against it until a spark makes the crisp glow, and from this we would light our bark cigarettes. I do not think any man in the world could inhale one of these bark cigarettes: some of us tried and went right to sleep.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Cure for Tuberculosis Claimed.

An Italian physician, Prof. Domenico Lo Monaco, announces that he has evolved a remedy for consumption. The base of his discovery lies in his finding that sugar applied to the bronchial secretions caused the disappearance not only of the secretions but of tubercle bacilli as well. The importance of this lies in that the bronchial secretion is held to be a necessary vehicle for the existence and growth of consumption germs.

Joined the Army.

A private in the quartermaster's corps at Camp Pike decided that he would sooner be in a more active branch of the service, so asked for and received a transfer to the artillery. After bidding him good-by, his bunkmate hung a service flag with one star in front of their barracks. On being asked what it all meant he said: "Our Joe has joined the army."

WORLD NEEDS FOOD

Demand Makes Opportunity for Returning Soldiers

Thousands Will See Glorious Possibilities in Settlement of Available Farm Land in This Country and in Canada.

The war is over, peace will soon be signed, the fighting nations have sheathed their swords, and the day of reconstruction has come.

What of it?

Hundreds of thousands of men, taken from the fields of husbandry, from the ranks of labor, from the four walls of the counting house, and the confines of the workshop, taken from them to do their part, their large part, in the prevention of the spoliation of the world, and in the meantime removed from the gear of common everyday life, will be returning, only to find in many cases old positions filled, the machinery with which they were formerly attached dislocated.

Are they to become aimless wanderers, with the ultimate possibility of augmenting an army of menacing loafers? If they do it is because their ability to assist in laying new foundations, in building up much-required structures, is underestimated. Men who fought as they fought, who risked and faced dangers as they did, are not of the caliber likely to flinch when it comes to the restoration of what the enemy partially destroyed, when it comes to the reconstruction of the world, the ideals of which they had in view when they took part in the great struggle whose divine purpose was to bring about this reconstruction.

Inured to toil, thoughtless of fatigue, trained in initiative and hardened by their outdoor existence, they will return better and stronger men, boys will have matured and young men will have developed.

They will decide for themselves lines of action and thought, and what their future should and will be. On the field of battle they developed alertness and wisdom, and they will return with both shedding from every pore.

Action was their watchword, and it will stand them in good stead now that the din of the battle no longer rings in their ears, or the zero hour signals them to the fray, and it will continue their entire existence.

But if they return to find their old avocations gone, their places filled, the institutions with which they were connected no longer existing, new walks of life and employment must be opened to them. It may be that the counting house, the factory, the workshop will have lost their attraction. The returned soldier will look elsewhere for employment; within his reach there is always the "Forward-to-the-Land" necessity. In this lies the remedy that will not only take care of a multitude of those who may not be able to return to their former occupations, whose desires are not to do so, whose health prohibits them from indoor life or whose outdoor habits from the past one, two, three or four years have given them such a taste and desire for it that confinement would be unbearable. Farm life will thus appeal to them, and the indications are that it will be taken advantage of by thousands. It means much to them as well as to the continent of America that provides the opportunity to the world at large, and to the stricken and famished nations of Europe, who, not only today, but for years to come, will require the sustenance that can only largely be supplied by the United States and Canada. By following the pursuit of agriculture the returned soldier will continue the cause he so greatly advanced when fighting on the field of battle. Both countries have undeveloped areas yet open to settlement.

There is little need here to direct attention to the wealth that has come to the farmers of Canada within the past few years. It is not only in grain growing that unqualified and almost unequaled success has followed honest effort, but the raising of horses, cattle, sheep and hogs has been a large source of profit. These are facts that are well known to the many friends and acquaintances of the thousands of farmers from the United States who have acquired wealth on the prairies of Western Canada. Farms of from one hundred and sixty to six hundred and forty acres of the richest soil may be secured on reasonable terms, and with an excellent climate, with a school system equal to any in the world, and desirable social conditions, little else could be asked.

Canadian statesmen are today busily engaged planning for the future of the returned soldier with a view to making him independent of state help after the immediate necessary assistance has been granted, the main idea being to show in the fullest degree the country's appreciation of the services he has rendered.

But now that the war is ended, and the fact apparent that of all avocations the most profitable and independent is that of the farmer, there will be a strong desire to secure farm lands for cultivation. Canada offers the opportunity to those seeking, not as speculation but as production. The deepest interest is taken by Federal and Provincial authorities to further the welfare of the farmer and secure a maximum return for his efforts. Large sums of money are spent in educational and experimental work. Engaged on experimental and demonstration farms, and in the agricultural colleges, are men of the highest technical knowledge and practical experience, some being professors of international reputation. The results of experiments and tests are free and available to all. Educational opportunities for farmers are the concern of the government and appreciation is shown by the number of farmers who attend the free courses.

Agriculture in Canada has reached a high standard, notwithstanding which lands are low in price.

Thus upon the United States and Canada, for many years will rest the great burden of feeding the world. With free interchange of travel, difficulties of crossing and recrossing removed, Canada may look for a speedy resumption of the large influx of settlers from the United States which prevailed previous to the war. During the war period there was a dread of something, no one seemed to know what. If the American went to Canada he might be conscripted, put in prison, or in his attempt to cross the border he would meet with innumerable difficulties, most of which, of course, was untrue. These untruths were circulated for a purpose by an element, which, it was discovered, had an interest in fomenting and creating trouble and distrust between two peoples whose language and aims in life should be anything but of an unfriendly character. The draft law of the United States, adopted for the carrying out of the high purposes had in view by the United States, kept many from going to Canada during the period of the war. The citizen army of the United States was quickly mobilized, and contained a large percentage of the young men from the farms. In this way many were presented from going to Canada.

That is all over now. There are no real or imaginary restrictions; there is no draft law to interfere. On the contrary, there is an unfathomable depth of good feeling, and the long-existing friendship is stronger than ever. This has been brought about by the knowledge of what has been done in the recent great struggle, each vying with the other in giving credit for what was accomplished. In thought and feeling, in language, in aims in life, in work, in desire to build up a new world, there has been bred a kinship which is as indissoluble as time itself.—Advertisement.

By treating them with certain gases a Frenchman has succeeded in keeping eggs fresh for ten months.

The Reason.

"There goes a crack regiment."

"I suppose that is why there is so much sap about its marching."